



Vernetzungsprojekt

*Music, Violence, Memory in
Auschwitz-Birkenau:
Memory Project*
—
Oświęcim (Poland), 28.11.2025

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11/25-FB2-VP

Project number: 11/25-FB2-VP

Report on the International Conference

Music, Violence, Memory in Auschwitz-Birkenau (26–28 November 2025), II. Memory Project (28 November 2025)

Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau, Oświęcim, Poland

The conference *Music, Violence, Memory in Auschwitz-Birkenau* took place from 26 to 28 November 2025 at the Educational Centre of the Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau in Oświęcim, Poland. It was organised by Prof. Dr. Krzysztof Kozłowski (AMU, Poznań, Poland) and Prof. Dr. Anno Mungen (Research Institute for Music Theatre (*fimt*), University of Bayreuth, Germany) in collaboration with the Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau. The aim of the conference was to explore the connections between music, space, and violence in Auschwitz, as well as their role in contemporary remembrance culture within intercultural and intergenerational contexts.

1. Objectives of the Conference/Project

The conference was structured in two parts: the *History Project* (26–27 November) and the *Memory Project* (28 November). This separation allowed for a focused historiographical and methodological exploration of music and violence in general and of music in Auschwitz in particular, while keeping it distinct from the reflection on and discussion of memory culture related to music and violence in Auschwitz.

Short Review on the *History Project* (supported by Fritz-Thyssen-Stiftung)

Both parts of the conference were closely interconnected. Before the participants engaged in discussions on practices and media forms of memory culture in an intercultural context, the *History Project* laid the groundwork by addressing the fundamental methodological and historiographical aspects of the conference's research focus: music and violence in the Auschwitz concentration camp complex. On 26 November, lectures by Dr. Morag J. Grant (UK), M.A. Nikola Vasilijević (Germany), and Dr. Élise Petit (France) applied approaches from ritual studies, phenomenology, and topography, sharpening the focus on music and violence and establishing a foundation for further exploration of the connections between the arts and the Holocaust in general, and of music practices in Auschwitz in particular.

The Guided Tour on 27 November provided participants with a deeper understanding of the case studies, which was then reflected in the subsequent lectures on music practices in Auschwitz (Prof. Dr. Patricia Hall, USA; Dr. Laurence Sherr, USA; Prof. Dr. Lori Weintrob, USA; Dr. Jacek Lachendro, Poland; Prof. Dr. Anno Mungen, Germany).

The exchange between presenters from the *History Project* and the following *Memory Project* generated new perspectives and ideas, contributing to the ongoing examination of the previously under-researched field of music and violence. In this way, the

Memory Project built upon the insights already gained, linking them to reflections on the current state of memory culture in relation to music and violence.

The Memory Project

The *Memory Project* focused on the following key questions:

- What role do media play in the forms and practices of contemporary memory of music and violence? Which narratives are conveyed through film, music, exhibitions, literature, and encyclopaedias?
- How can research and practice be connected so that both areas benefit optimally from one another?
- What characterises local and global manifestations of remembrance culture and their connection to the media mentioned above? What challenges and opportunities arise and in what forms is dialogue between countries and generations possible?
- What challenges do established forms of remembrance culture in Poland, Germany, and other countries face with regard to younger generations? What motivates young people to engage with the history of the Holocaust and how can they contribute to its further development?

To support reflection and discussion on these questions, the conference pursued the following objectives:

- Combining different research methods, particularly linking work-based analysis with approaches from cultural studies, sociology, and other related humanities disciplines. Using case studies from various art forms (music theatre, literature, film, etc.), the conference addressed important methodological and ethical questions relevant to both research and practice.
- Promoting academic exchange and networking across disciplines, cultural contexts, and career stages.
- Creating a safe space for critical reflection and open discussion within a collegial atmosphere, enabling encounters on equal footing and overcoming cultural and generational boundaries.

2. Target Groups and Audience Response

The *Memory Project* program included nine researchers from the U.S., Spain, Italy, Poland, and Germany, four of whom were doctoral students or postdocs. The speakers were selected through a combination of direct invitations and a Call for Papers, published in April 2025. The response to the Call highlighted the relevance of discussions on contemporary challenges in memory culture across different countries and indicated that the submitted papers should be integrated as a dedicated subproject within the larger conference program.

The event attracted over 60 registered in-person participants. In addition, an online livestream was made available via Zoom, with 46 registered viewers, allowing the

conference to reach researchers, students, and other interested participants worldwide. With English as the conference's working language, presentations were not only internationally accessible but also enabled barrier-free communication among participants on site, promoting intensive exchange on the given topic.

One of the target groups of the conference was students from Poland and Germany. Among the participants there were 27 students from Poznań, Bayreuth, and Leipzig, representing not only two countries with distinct Holocaust memory narratives but also different academic fields and levels: 13 bachelor's students in film and media studies from Poland and 14 bachelor's and master's students in music and theatre studies from Germany. Through their engagement in the conference sessions, the students were able to explore cultural differences and field-specific aspects in depth, gaining new insights for their future careers in music, music theatre, and film, and fostering ongoing exchange that continues to this day.

In the run-up to the conference, a press release from the University of Bayreuth attracted the attention of German media, bringing the topic of music in Auschwitz to a broader public. As a result, three interviews with representatives of the conference organising team (Prof. Dr. Anno Mungen and M.A. Lidia Krier – *fimt*, University of Bayreuth) were published:

- “Musik, Gewalt, Erinnerung: Tagung ‘Musik in Auschwitz’”, Deutschlandfunk Kultur, 25.11.2025, online: <https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/musik-gewalt-erinnerung-tagung-musik-in-auschwitz-100.html> .
- “Musik in Auschwitz. Wann war das Musizieren auf Befehl?”, Nordbayerischer Kurier, 25.11.2025, online: <https://www.kurier.de/inhalt.musik-in-auschwitz-wann-war-das-musizieren-auf-befehl.64b8a35d-a516-462b-b21c-322a07069175.html> .
- “Musik in Auschwitz. Zwischen Gewalt, Widerstand und Erinnerung”, Sonntagsblatt, 26.11.2025, online: <https://www.sonntagsblatt.de/artikel/kultur/musik-auschwitz-zwischen-gewalt-widerstand-und-erinnerung> .

3. Summary of Individual Contributions

The *Memory Project* program consisted of ten sessions, organised into two panels to facilitate moderation. Its interdisciplinary approach was reflected in contributions from film studies, cultural studies, musicology, literary studies, and sociology. A distinctive feature of the *Memory Project* was the inclusion of three practice-oriented formats: a student workshop, a lecture recital, and a film screening, each followed by a discussion. Panels were moderated by presenters from the *History Project*: Prof. Dr. Lori Weintrob (USA) and Prof. Dr. Sven Kramer (Germany).

3.1. Workshops

M.A. Zuzanna Karpińska (AMU, Poznań, Poland), M.A. Martin Gruber (University of Bayreuth, Germany)

Workshop for students

“Mediating Memory. Intercultural Dialogue on Forms of Remembering in *The Passenger*”

An important part of the project was the workshop entitled “Mediating Memory. Intercultural Dialogue on Forms of Remembering in *The Passenger*”. It was led by M.A. Martin Gruber from the University of Bayreuth and M.A. Zuzanna Karpińska from the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań.

The workshop was addressed to the students participating in the conference and brought together a group of 27 young people from Poznań, Bayreuth, and Leipzig. It took the form of an open discussion with elements of comparative analysis of a film and a novel, as well as the personal experiences of those who participated in the guided tours held on the previous day.

Using Zofia Posmysz’s novel *The Passenger* and its adaptations as a starting point for discussion on the transformation and mediatisation of memory, participants had the opportunity to share their thoughts on the experience of the camp space and exchange their observations on strategies for portraying it in cultural texts. Both Polish and German students were eager to speak up, which resulted in a vivid and valuable discussion.

One of the main objectives of the workshop was to facilitate dialogue between representatives of the youngest generation of researchers from two countries that historically found themselves on opposite sides of the divide. As expected, the participants’ country of origin did not influence the nature of their reflections. All of them showed great sensitivity and curiosity, as well as openness to the perspective of the ‘other side’, which enabled a genuine intercultural dialogue. The fact that the students who took part in the workshop later established contact with one another and are planning joint initiatives gives hope that actions such as those described are worthwhile and can indeed contribute to building a more peaceful future.

3.2. Paper presentations

Panel 1, Moderation: Prof. Dr. Lori Weintrob (Wagner College Holocaust Center, Staten Island, New York City, NY, USA)

Dr. habil. Katarzyna Naliwajek (University of Warsaw, Poland)

“Female German-Jewish Musicians – Victims of Auschwitz – and Their Commemoration”

Music historian Katarzyna Naliwajek’s paper reflected on how the biographies of female German-Jewish musicians imprisoned and murdered in Auschwitz are currently represented, taking a gendered perspective into focus. In addition to

highlighting forgotten or little-known names, she examined how these life stories are portrayed in encyclopaedic sources and explored ways to commemorate and educate about them in today's global consciousness.

Prof. Dr. Mikołaj Jazdon (AMU, Poznań, Poland)

“Amongst the Ashes of Auschwitz. On Andrzej Brzozowski's Archeology”

Mikołaj Jazdon focused on the Polish short documentary film *Archeologia* (1967) by Andrzej Brzozowski. By telling the stories of Auschwitz victims through personal everyday objects uncovered during archaeological excavations, the film shifted the perspective to the everyday life of prisoners. Jazdon's analysis reflected on the types of sources used in historiographical research and considered the role and potential of documentary film as a medium of memory culture.

Prof. Dr. Christine Hoppe (Universität der Künste Berlin, Germany)

“Memory in Sound, Materiality: A Chopin Étude and a Cello as Media of Musical Remembrance”

Using examples of Chopin's Étude's Op. 10 No. 3 use in films and of a display of a cello from Auschwitz in musical instrument exhibitions, Christine Hoppe explored how music and musical objects function as carriers of memory today. While the Étude can be seen as an adaptive medium because its meaning can be re-shaped by the specific context and narratives of the films in which it appears, the cello as a fixed physical artifact serves as a 'mute witness' to the systematic dispossession of Jewish musicians through its presence in museum collections. Hoppe also raised important ethical questions, including whether, and if so how, such objects should be exhibited in museums or musically reactivated to evoke and preserve memories through performance.

Panel 2, Moderation: Prof. Dr. Sven Kramer (Leuphana Universität Lüneburg, Germany)

Prof. Dr. Andrea Bombi (Universitat de València, Spain)

“Sonic Mnemagogues: the Phonosphere of *If this is a man*”

Using a quantitative and qualitative analysis of sound and music descriptions in one of the central texts dealing with music in Auschwitz – Primo Levi's *If This Is a Man* (1947), in which the author 'composed' a soundscape of the Monowitz camp (Auschwitz III) – Andrea Bombi prompted a profound reflection on the nature of literary sources as both historical documents and works of art. This approach shifted the discussion from music itself to the broader concept of sound, including music as sound, illustrating how memories of music and sound can be constructed and conveyed through literature.

3.3. Examples from practice: Lecture Recital and Film Screening (as parts of Panel 2)

M.A. Chiara Antico (Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Portugal)

Lecture recital

“Collecting and Embodying Auschwitz Music Repertoire as a Living Archive: The Resonances Project”

In her lecture recital, violist, scholar, music teacher, and Holocaust educator Chiara Antico presented her project *The Resonances*. The lecture component introduced a collection of quotations from survivor musicians from the women’s and men’s music blocks of the Auschwitz camp system, highlighting practices such as private concerts for the SS and auditions for camp orchestras as well as the music performed in these contexts. Antico then performed selected pieces mentioned in these quotations on the viola, creating an immersive connection between research and practice and making the music and associated practices more tangible. Through this project, which seeks to restore resonance to the voices of the victims, Antico provoked lively discussion and engagement following the presentation.

Prof. Dr. Laura Morowitz (Wagner College Holocaust Center, Staten Island, New York City, NY, USA), Prof. Dr. Mikołaj Jazdon (AMU, Poznań, Poland), and Prof. Dr. Marek Kaźmierczak (AMU, Poznań, Poland)
Screening of the film *Lilac/Bez* (2025)

Profs. Mikołaj Jazdon and Marek Kaźmierczak (AMU, Poland) presented the documentary film they co-directed (together with Piotr Jaxa), which had previously been screened at the 23rd Annual Garden State Film Festival in New Jersey, USA in 2025. The film follows the family history of Laura Morowitz (Wagner College Holocaust Center, USA) – one of the researchers who presented a paper during the *History Project* – as she and her daughters, Isabelle and Olivia Schechter, search for traces of their family in Poland that were lost during the Holocaust. Using the poetics of a ‘photofilm’ and silence as a powerful sound element, the film illustrates the erasure of the family’s history, resonating with its title, in which “bez” in Polish means both “lilac” and “without.” The screening provided a foundation not only for discussions on the aesthetics of film as a medium for exploring memory but also for the closing discussion on the significance of family histories in sustaining and shaping future practices of remembrance.

4. Overall Results of the Conference/Project in Relation to the Objectives

The *Memory Project* highlighted the diversity of Holocaust remembrance practices across different media and demonstrated the ongoing relevance of critical reflection and discussion on music and violence in media. Through numerous case studies it became particularly evident that sound and music (often itself considered as sound)

are deeply embedded in survivors' memories and frequently serve as essential narrative elements in accounts of violence.

The workshop and the exchanges between presentations further showed that students, as representatives of the younger generation from both Poland and Germany, engaged seriously with the discussions and participated actively. They not only gained valuable insights but also independently planned and initiated further collaborative projects, thereby strengthening long-term cooperation across national and disciplinary boundaries. One concrete outcome is that two students (one from the Polish group and one from the German group) will contribute an essay on differences in memory cultures to the planned post-conference volume.

Although the research questions outlined in Section 1 are relevant to the study of other concentration and extermination camps, the conference presentations focused specifically on the Auschwitz concentration camp complex. This focus enabled a more in-depth and concentrated analytical discussion of music and violence. The results of the conference, which will be published as a volume in 2027, provide a foundation for further research on music and violence and can be applied to other case studies. In this way, they contribute both to the visibility of a still underexplored field of study and to the development of initiatives aimed at peace building and promoting remembrance culture.

5. Potential Follow-Up Projects / Planned Publications (Digital and Print)

The post-conference volume for the entire event is scheduled to be published in early 2027. The possibility of making the volume available via Open Access is currently under review. Building on this work, further collaborative projects have emerged among Polish, American, and German participants of the project.

Abstract

The international conference *Music, Violence, Memory in Auschwitz-Birkenau* took place from 26 to 28 November 2025 at the Educational Centre of the Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau in Oświęcim, Poland. It was organised by Prof. Dr. Krzysztof Kozłowski (AMU, Poznań) and Prof. Dr. Anno Mungen (*fimt*, University of Bayreuth) in collaboration with the Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau. The conference was divided into two parts: the *History Project* (26–27 November) focusing on methodological and historiographical perspectives and the *Memory Project* (28 November) emphasising memory culture and practice-oriented formats.

The *Memory Project* examined how music, sound, and musical objects function in Holocaust memory across different media. Presentations and formats including a lecture recital, a workshop for students, and a film screening with following critical discussions addressed the methodological and ethical dimensions on remembrance culture practices of the topic of music and violence in Auschwitz. Key aims were to explore the role of media in memory, link research with practice, foster intercultural and intergenerational exchange, and engage younger generations in critical reflection on the given topic. Case studies ranged from a gender-oriented critique of encyclopaedic representations of female victims (Katarzyna Naliwajek) and literary analyses (Andrea Bombi) to the integration of victim memory into music performances (Chiara Antico), documentary films (Mikołaj Jazdon, Marek Kaźmierczak), and the presentation of musical artifacts (Christine Hoppe), highlighting how sound and music can operate as carriers of memory on violence.

The conference demonstrated the diversity of Holocaust remembrance and the centrality of music and sound in survivor memory. Students from Poland and Germany actively engaged, developing new insights and planning further collaborative projects, including an essay for the planned 2027 conference volume. The focused examination of Auschwitz enabled in-depth discussion of music and violence, while fostering dialogue on global and local forms of remembrance culture. The outcomes of the *Memory Project* contribute to the visibility of the underexplored field of music and violence, provide a foundation for future research, and support initiatives in peace building and developing intercultural remembrance culture.